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September is National Preparedness Month:  
Preparing for Pandemic Influenza

(Martinsburg, WV-- August 19, 2006) – September is National Preparedness Month and the Berkeley County Health Department will urge all residents to take some simple steps to make their families better prepared for emergencies, including preparedness for a pandemic influenza. "There are things individuals and families can do now to can prepare for an influenza pandemic", said Diana Gaviria, MD, MPH, Health Officer for Berkeley County Health Department.

"While there are no cases of bird flu in humans in the United States at this time, much attention has been given to the H5N1 virus in birds", said Pamela Holstein-Wallace, threat preparedness coordinator for the Berkeley County Health Department. Of those humans that have been infected with this "bird flu" in other parts of the world, most, if not all, of these people have gotten the illness from birds-not from other people. But for those who have contracted the flu, this strain of flu appears to be severe with a high death rate. "This strain appears to have a 50% mortality rate. In other words, half of those infected with this strain die", said Holstein-Wallace.

In the medical community, there is concern that this strain of bird flu could cause a pandemic-a dangerous global outbreak of disease. The pandemic may or may not be caused by the current bird flu, but history tells us a pandemic is likely to affect the United States in the near future. A global outbreak will only happen if the flu virus changes so that people can easily get it from each other, not just from birds. "That has not happened yet", Holstein-Wallace said.

"Pandemic influenza preparedness can be useful in other types of emergencies such as power outages, snow storms, and disasters", Dr. Gavaria said. During a pandemic, if residents cannot get to a store, or if stores are out of supplies, it will be important to have extra supplies on hand. "Residents should know both the magnitude of what can happen during a pandemic outbreak and what actions can be taken to help lessen the impact of influenza pandemic on themselves and their families", said Dr. Gaviria.

A checklist for individuals and families in preparing for pandemic influenza can be found at [www.wvflu.org](http://www.wvflu.org). In recognition of National Preparedness Month in September, the Berkeley County Health Department suggests families begin making preparations now about how they would be cared for if they got sick and urge residents to also get involved in local planning. "Pandemics are global in nature, but their impact is certainly felt locally", said Holstein-Wallace. "It's not a question of if a pandemic will happen, but when the next pandemic strikes, we want our community to get involved in planning and be prepared".

For more information on pandemic influenza, contact the Berkeley County Health Department at 304-263-5131 or the WV Bureau for Public Health's Division of Threat Preparedness website at <http://www.wvdhhr.org/healthprep/>.

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